

# THE CEA CRITIC

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October, 1960

## If We Yearn to be a Profession . . .

Through its twenty years of existence, and speaking through many individual voices, CEA has maintained that the teaching of literature and humane learning is a worthy profession for scholars. It has maintained that scholarship should be penetrating and vital, and that it is not, and should never become, the enemy of good teaching. CEA has maintained that the Ph.D. degree, if it is a requisite to college teaching, should be a discipline which soundly and adequately prepares for that teaching. And in consequence of these beliefs, CEA has held that professional advancement should bear direct relationship to good teaching. Teaching quality is not measured by the length of a bibliography.

But when I make these assertions, I am reminded that we will never secure for teaching the reward it deserves until we can offer to administrators a measuring stick for teaching which they can understand. What is good teaching?

Is there a measure of teaching adequacy which does not depend upon whimsically subjective judgment, good-Joe-ism, and imprecisions?

I know many administrators and department heads who have thrown in the sponge. They say that they believe in good teaching and wish to reward it. And yet they still reward publication (any publication) rather than teaching excellence.

I deplore this fact as completely as does anyone. But until responsible professional people — and this surely means CEA as a professional organization—help the administrator to find ways to judge good teaching as teaching, and show a willingness to examine and to discipline their own body in the interest of professional fulfillment, we must remain satisfied and uncomplaining if we see rewards going where accomplishment is easily measurable. Pious affirmations of the value of teaching will not effect nearly so great an improvement as will our offering solid proposals to an administration as to how it will find and cherish its true teachers.

On the average, I fear, my colleagues are afraid to risk their futures upon the judgment of their clients, the students. And yet, in my own experience, the judgment of students, perhaps weighted according to their academic success, has seemed very penetrating and usually fair.

On the average, my colleagues shy away from evaluation by their peers, and even more vigorously they shy away from any responsibility for judging their peers in turn. Yet it seems to me that the privilege of being judged by one's peers is one of the privileges of a democratic society. Furthermore, an unwillingness to exercise judgment

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## Linguistics and Diagramming

**DURHAM, N.C.** The value of diagramming in grammatical analysis continues to be disputed. This is normal enough, but it is surprising to find Harry R. Warfel, in the February CEA Critic, attacking parsing and diagramming as tools of traditionalist grammar, which tries to make "an intellectual exercise" of the study of language. "Instead of making language study a matter of intellectual discipline," Warfel tells us, "the structuralists insist that students shall hear the language patterns and produce them on the tongue effortlessly." Warfel regards traditionalist grammar as

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28 December at 7:30 a.m., Provincial Room of the Sylvania Hotel. **Regional Breakfast,** Patrick G. Hogan, Jr., Regional Coordinator, moderator.

28 December at 5:30 - 8:00 p.m., Crystal Room of the Bellevue-Stratford. **Reception and Dinner.** John Ciardi, Rutgers University, speaker.

Plan to visit Booth No. 128 and the Headquarters Suite in the Bellevue-Stratford.

hopelessly out of date, and repeats the Fries comparison with Ptolemaic astronomy. Still worse, he considers that traditionalist grammarians are at present engaged in a "movement to impede the progress of a scientific analysis of language." Traditionalists are used to being considered out of date by those who ignore the best products of the tradition and judge it by textbooks used in the schools. At the moment traditionalists have reason to be somewhat amused by the fact that Harris-Chomsky transformational syntax, in procedure much like good traditionalist syntax, seems about to make the skillfully merchandised structuralist grammars of the 1950's not only out of date but "dated," in the sense that the hula hoop of the 1950's is dated. As for "movements," surely everyone knows that the only movements in the field of English language are the structuralist crusades set in motion by Fries and Trager and Smith and continued by such men as Warfel. There is no traditionalist movement.

It is high time the structuralists calmed down. It is disturbing to find Harold B. Allen, in the February College English, admitting to attacks of nerves when he feels it necessary to read nonstructuralist discussions of linguistic matters. Traditionalists are not enemies of God simply because, knowing the work of such men as Poutsma and Palmer, they cannot believe that good English grammar begins with Bloomfield, or because they feel, like the British linguist Firth, that "to dismiss two thousand years of linguistic study in Asia as well as in Europe as negligible" is "just plain stupid." Practically all traditionalists know that the grammar of the schools needs revision, and that revision now should take into account the recent work of such men as Harris, Bolinger, and Pike. The salesmen-evangelists of pseudoscientific Friesist and Trager-Smithist analysis are not helping the situation with their constant denunciations of the tradition. Traditionalists have fought back very little: if the meek inherit linguistics as it is beginning to seem possible, it will be because the arrogant are their own worst enemies. As James Sledd has reminded us, linguists must be lovable if they are to be loved.

It would be easy for Warfel to cite examples of structuralist rejection of parsing and diagramming, and even structuralist rejection of explicit grammatical doctrine, in teaching situations. Thus anyone who undertakes a program of visiting English classes in public and private schools in Puerto Rico will be struck by characteristic contrasts in procedure. In the numerous (largely church-supported) private schools, traditionalist grammatical doctrine is commonly taught, and parsing and diagramming are commonly employed. In the public schools, the Fries American English Series (1952-1957) is the backbone of the English program, and "pattern practice" is carried on year after year, characteristically without the use of analysis, "rules," or diagramming. In the public schools children are put through sequence after sequence such as the following:

That's a yellow pen.  
That pen is yellow.  
That's a white light.  
That light is white.

Adolescents are subject to more complex series:

Batista, come to the front of the room.  
I told Batista to come to the front of the room.  
What did I say to Batista?  
You told Batista to come to the front of the room.

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## THE CEA CRITIC

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## DEPARTMENTAL STATUS LEVELS

As this Association prepares to devote its annual meeting to the question, "Are the graduate schools killing undergraduate English?" no doubt the social structure of English departments—both internally and in relation to the academic world as a whole, will come under scrutiny. For it is from the shape of the department that we may discern the deployment of its resources, its own idea of its meaning and function, and perhaps even its values, revealed less in what the department says than in what it does.

We find the English department to be usually the largest single such organization in the university, but with proportionately more instructors and fewer professors than others. Its course offerings begin with the most general and end with the most special concerns, and its student populations begin with almost all the members of freshman classes but dwindle down during four years to a proportion of seniors almost too small to convert to a meaningful statistic.

First-year students have almost no choice of courses; what the department decides to give to one it is likely to give to all. The students may have no choice of instructors, either; they learn to live with the one in charge of the class they are assigned to. For seniors, on the other hand, the choice of courses and teachers is so wide that the department cannot guarantee that any particular student is studying or has studied anything in particular. English departments deal in extremes.

The unique course which one department decides to impose on every freshman may differ wholly from the course another may choose, and change from year to year; a single department may be sure what it wants its sophomores to know, but the profession is obviously uncertain. There is, however, reasonable consensus among English departments on what graduating majors should know—there just aren't enough courses, enough hours, or enough professors to teach it to them.

English departments present extremes of status, also. There is no one more respected than a senior professor of English who teaches from two to six graduate students in one or two classes. Below him are professors who teach both graduate and upper undergraduate students, and, a step lower, those who teach only upper undergraduates. Still lower are those whose main business is teaching sophomore literature, with now and then an upper course. Then there are those who teach entirely in the junior college, those who teach freshman English only, and—still going down—the graduate fellows and assistants, the housewives and other occasionalists who teach one or two sections and spend their lives otherwise in even lower status activities, such as studying or school-teaching. Not every English department can include all these status levels, but the best and most reputable university departments can and do include them all. Other departments manage as many levels as they can.

This status ladder offers in its own way some interesting extremes in scholarly and human values. It is not precisely a ladder, for it breaks sharply at the point where the subject-matter of instruction becomes primarily belletristic—after the freshman or sometimes the sophomore year. Above this break, the amenities of the department approach those of any department, though any individual's approach to any given rank or salary is far slower than in departments whose main burden of instruction begins after the freshman year.

Below this break is what may fairly be described as an academic, economic, and scholarly slum. Its dominant rank is the instructorship. An instructorship in English is unmatched by any rank in any other field. It is lower than the lowest. Pay is low, and prestige is low; both are sub-professional. It has not been unusual for a Ph. D. to spend five to fifteen years in this rank before grudging admission to the assistant professorship. There are only two ways to go: up, or out into another college, business, government, or the secondary schools. Probably more instructors go out than up.

Freshman and sophomore English courses are designed by the upper staff, who do not generally teach them; disliked by the instructors who do; and despised by the students, who take them, like medicine, as something bitter that should do them some good. Textbooks and syllabi are written by the upper staff, who do not apply them, for the instructors, who do not want them but must use them. Instead of being free creative preceptors for their own students, sensing their needs and responding with scholarship to those needs, they are middlemen in a mass market. In these freshman courses, both teachers and students are there because they were told to be there, doing what they were told to do.

If the freshman courses are an academic slum, they are, even more, a scholarly slum, unmatched in other fields. In senior-college and graduate school, there is probably no more conscientious, rigorous, more closely scrutinized scholarship than that in English literary history, literary criticism, and philology. No one would dream of publishing a paper that he could not document. This rigor infuses instruction in most classrooms. Yet in the same department, the courses for fresh-

(Please turn to page 3)

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## PAPERBOUND PREVIEW

Have an eye open for new paperbounds for class or personal use? Look over the following titles scheduled for November and December release (sprinkled with a few late September and October items not announced in time for inclusion in our last column). This list focuses on original titles and on first paperbound reprints.

The brevity of this list (compared to the longer ones in the May and September Critics) merits comment. Paperbound activity is by no means tapering off: the Fall edition of *Paperbound Books in Print* contains 700 new titles for a three-month period, and the Winter issue will be expanded by at least that many (and by at least a dozen new publishers). But most of the new titles of interest to English teachers are reprints of standard classics already available in many inexpensive editions (e.g., Signet Classics and Doubleday Dolphins). This trend is likely to continue, for most of the best in literature, history, and criticism has already reached the paperbound market.

Second, November and December are generally slack months in publishing, and we can expect increased activity in 1961.

Finally, because they have only text appeal, we have never noted new paperbound books in the burgeoning controlled research paper area.

Allen, Gay Wilson. *Walt Whitman*: Grove Evergreen Profile.

Blyth, R. H. *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*: Dutton Everyman Paperback.

Chute, Marchette. *Ben Johnson of Westminster*: Dutton Everyman Paperback.

Cohen, J. M. & M. J. *A Dictionary of Quotations*: Penquin.

Collins, Wilkie. *Short Stories*: A.S. Barnes Perpetua.

Dreiser, Theodore. *The Bulwark*: Popular Library.

Dudley, Ronald R. *The Civilization of Rome*: New American Library Mentor.

Freneau, Philip. *Poems*: Hafner.

Fuller, Edmund. *Man in Modern Fiction*: Modern Library Paperback.

Glasgow, Ellen. *In This Our Life*: Avon.

Goodrich, Norma Lorre. *The Ancient Myths*: New American Library Mentor.

Great Irish Plays: New American Library Mentor.

Howells, William Dean. *Their Wedding Journey*: Fawcett Premier.

Kozelka, Paul (ed.). *15 Distinguished One-Act Plays*: Washington Square Press.

Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*: Oxford Paperback.

London, Jack. *Sea Wolf*: Bantam.

Marquand, John P. *Wickford Point*: Bantam.

Melville, Herman. *Shorter Novels* (ed. by Raymond Weaver): Fawcett Premier.

Miller, Henry. *The Wisdom of the Heart*: New Directions.

Payne, Robert. *Hubris*: Harper Torchbook.

Rose, H. J. *A Handbook of Greek Literature*: Dutton Everyman Paperback.

Rose, H. J. *A Handbook of Latin Literature*: Dutton Everyman Paperback.

Shakespeare, William. *Sonnets*: Dell Laurel. Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*: New American Library Signet Classic.

Snow, C. P. *Time of Hope*: Harper Torchbook.

Strindberg, August. *Seven Plays* (trans. Arvid Paulson): Bantam.

Synge, John M. *Complete Plays*: Modern Library Paperback.

Tolstoy, Leo. *Short Stories* (trans. Arthur Mendel and Barbara Mekanowitzky): Bantam.

Young, G. M. *Victorian England*: Oxford Paperback.

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## STATUS LEVELS

(Continued from page 2)

men are almost untouched by scholarship, because the problems of freshman instruction are not felt to be worthy of scholarly study. There is no career line to be pursued by such study. What is rarer than an assistant, associate, or full professor of Freshman English or composition, promoted for his studies in that field to do more studies in it? Where there is no scholarship, there is no judgment, and as a result, English departments choose and force students to buy from a flood of meretricious books often written out of no research whatever by the same persons whose status in English derives from their careful historical and critical studies.

If some questions of ethics—scholarly and humane—seem to be posed by current practices in English departments, they do not seem obvious to their members, or at least are not much bruited about.

Perhaps there are none. The discussion at the 1960 CEA annual meeting should give some sign.

DONALD LLOYD

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## Latin: For You and Me and Sports Broadcasters

For best results in English, Latin must go into its foundations.

It may be that English can ultimately be assimilated up to a certain high point by the altogether Latinless. Given word-curiosity, natural or inculcated by patient teachers, numberless word-lists memorized, careful and conscientious reading of solid material, and association with people properly disposed toward language and occupied therewith, the individual may finally emerge equipped for the general needs of communication. But this is the long way around, and few there are with strength for the distance. Withal, the person so instructed will still be lacking in important respects. Subjectively, for instance, his language will not mean nearly as much to him as it would had he absorbed within himself the inner refinements of the Latin elements that ramify and ramify within our native speech, and that give to the person familiar with them (by translation contacts) keen appreciations of meaning, and soul-satisfying perspectives. He may be confident, from ill-informed counsels he has received, that he can garner in such necessities by simply committing to memory, almost any time in life, tabulations made up for him of selected concrete English-Latin relationships. But language is not the cut and dried something he (along with many an "educator") imagines it to be. It has a complex intricacy, and an intimacy and spirituality that are parts of all that it has met in an individual's past, day by day, and hour by hour. It has grown up with him, and inside him, in other words, for good or ill. Indirections of many sorts, more vital than items that have been won by direct assault, have imparted their often obscure but always essential contributions. There is in-

deed no possible substitute for Latin, the largest arsenal of our language and its ways.

So much for a sort of preamble. Now I wish to illustrate my meaning by applying it in a sphere of activity where it might be thought by most people to have very slight, if any, application.

When Mr. Mel Allen, in broadcasting the Army-Navy football game, used the

spun words and grammar, is an apparent exception. But if so (and it is not at all certain that he had no Latin), he is the shining exception that proves the rule.

I sent the following letters to two gentlemen who entertained me with baseball during the past summer:

(I) "This is a letter the like of which you have probably never received. I hope you will at least read it with patience.

"Besides being a strange letter it comes at an inappropriate time, when your thoughts will probably be far away from its contents and involved in the excitement of the closing of the baseball season.

"My letter is on the subject of Latin, and my thesis is that, without Latin discipline in one's early training, there is something vitally essential missing from the wherewithal for continuing learning throughout life. This is because, in the absence of some determined contact with Latin, boys and girls do not understand the principles of language structure, do not learn to reflect upon the rhythms, sounds, and variety and distinction in the meaning and choice of words. The piling up of more and more courses in English is not a satisfactory corrective, for under this monotonous system students begin to detest all serious study of their own language. They get no perspective on it; and the instructor, losing will and energy for his primary task, diverts the teaching of English away from language into 'literature,' which gives the student more freedom for rambling, and himself more of what some one has called a 'pedagogical bang.'

"Latin, it may be said, is by no means unpleasant if decently and respectfully approached, and in no sense beyond the powers of young students (as is proved all over Europe), and in addition can pro-

### NOMINATIONS

The CEA Committee on Nominations for office in 1961 has named the following:

#### President:

Harry T. Moore, Research Professor of English, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois

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Rudolph Fiehler, Professor of English, Louisiana Polytechnic, Ruston, Louisiana

#### Nominating Committee:

Donald Lloyd, Associate Professor of English, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan

Ed Hirshberg, Associate Professor of English, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida

Richard S. Bowman, Associate Professor of Comparative Lit., The Cooper Union, New York, New York

The present 2nd Vice-President, John Ball, automatically becomes 1st Vice-President.

Respectfully submitted,  
Henry W. Sams  
Patrick Hogan  
Keith Fennimore

There is a provision that extra names may be added to the ballot for Directors and Nominating Committeemen by petition signed by ten members. Such petitions should be sent to the Tampa office of the CEA within a week or so if the names are to appear on the printed ballot.

phrase, "at the inception of the play," I could say to myself with conviction: "Here is a man who saw Latin in his youth." And I could say the same of the gentleman who, in the Eagles-Redskins game, came out with "two consecutive plays that were absolutely identical." I am sure that practically all the broadcasters of sporting events that have reached eminence in their art have derived their verbal ability (inspiring their variety and economy of description) in measurable degree from learning their English in the Latin-assisted way. Dizzy Dean, he of the home-

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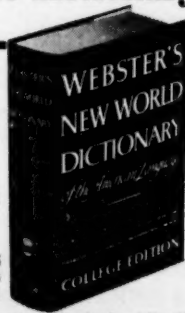
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vide an atmosphere of intellectual competition which is very seldom in evidence when all the language study is given over to pure vacuum-sealed English.

"I take advantage of you in the present instance in the hope of finding you my ally, and in recognition of the fact that baseball announcers are near and dear to a considerable portion of the public, and that therefore their unbiased thought on my subject might move many to reflection.

"I am certain that you and the others who have risen from playing ranks to your present responsible positions have done so because you have had since early school days a good command of the English language that has made you versatile speakers all the way along.

"Possibly you do not believe (as so many who have passed through the Latin mill do not) that your uncramped language ability has any strong connection with your high-school or college Latin. But from your choice of words, I know that either you have worked in Latin, or that your mother or father did, and passed on to you a concern for a fullness in language—at any rate, that there has been a tradition of using good English in your family, and that this came in necessary part from the contemplation of more than just English; in a word, that there must have been Latin somewhere along the line, and not far back, either.

"I realize that your opinions may not altogether correspond with mine. I have been a college professor of French, Spanish, and German, while your career has taken you into totally different fields. That fact would make your approval of Latin all the more impressive. Should you think that Latin is not particularly important, I should like to know that, too.

"If one's capacity in one's own language is low, he may as well discard the

thought of learning another modern language to any serviceable extent, and this is one of the main reasons why English should be lifted—with the aid of the Latin lever."

(II) "It is a conviction of mine that one is not apt to get very far in any profession involving much use of the English language for public purposes unless in his youth Latin has helped to enrich his consciousness of his native tongue.

"I trust that this long but abrupt statement will not throw you off balance, or keep you wondering too long that it is addressed to you. I should like to produce a little article providing additional proof for educational advisers and administrators that Latin, whether the individuals who have passed through its discipline admit its worth to them in their English assets or not, has at some time in their student days been a serious part in the preparation of those who rise to prominence in a field apparently far removed from Latin, the play by play broadcasting of baseball games (or it may be prize fighting or horse racing).

"I do not find fault with any one who frankly feels that the Latin of his early days did not influence his command of English, then or now. Winston Churchill has spoken slightly of Latin as assistant-former of his well-known precise and effective style. But whether it is Churchill or a baseball announcer that is in question, if the fact remains that he did have the Latin discipline in his background, it is entirely pertinent to ask what he might have been without it. At any rate, I find that I am seldom wrong in guessing whether or not a given speaker or writer has or has not had Latin among the preliminaries of his lifelong education.

"And so it is my confident guess that both you and your immediate side-partners (also like the everywhere-in-demand Al Helfer and Mel Allen) studied Latin in the high schools, and not slothfully, or reluctantly, either.

"I believe your words, should you have some enthusiasm for Latin, would not fall unheeded upon the ears of our educational planners or the general public. Let me say too that I have been moved to write the foregoing by somewhat bitter experience. I have been trying to teach modern foreign languages (not Latin) for many years to students the mass of whom were impoverished in their English, who ridiculously wanted to learn overnight to speak a foreign tongue, though they shied at the words of their own language that were spelled in more than two syllables."

Thus end the two letters. Mr. Waite C. Hoyt, now for many years broadcaster of games of the Cincinnati "Reds," in answer to Number One, confessed that he had "forgotten" his Latin (three years in high school), but he is living proof of the fact that here is a subject which, unlike many another "forgotten" one, somehow maintains an unrelenting hold upon basic features of one's mental growth. He recognizes

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### AMERICAN DRAMATIC LITERATURE

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## DIAGRAMMING

(Continued from page 1)

There is a tremendous amount of drill on sequences such as these. What is central is not content but grammatical patterning, and sometimes teachers work hard to think of something to be said that will fit the day's pattern. Vocabulary is sharply limited—structuralists tend to oppose attention to vocabulary—and the whole procedure is certainly unintellectual enough to please Warfel. The procedure is also about as formal and unnatural as parsing and diagramming, and it tends to be much duller. The sentences students are expected to produce "on the tongue effortlessly" are simple ones: unfortunately the sentences people produce when they deal with complex subject matter involve effort, and the brain must be taken into account rather than the tongue. It is generally believed that the conservative private schools teach English much more effectively than the public schools. Students seem to like the private-school procedures better too: in April when a reporter from the *Island Times* asked a number of high-school students how they liked their English, every student enrolled in a public school expressed disapproval and every student enrolled in a private school expressed approval.

But the truth is that both traditionalists and structuralists are divided in their views of procedures such as these. There is a considerable record of structuralist interest in diagramming: a recent example is R. Donald Cain's paper on diagramming in *College Composition and Communication*, and an important structuralist textbook

employing a fair amount of diagramming is W. Nelson Francis's *Structure of American English* (1958).

Actually diagramming is to the grammarian what phonemic transcription is to the phonemicist: it serves to give accurate visual representation to analyses that are inevitably complex. Like phonemic transcription, diagramming requires of the teacher who employs it a fairly complete mastery of a consistent system of analysis, since it is almost impossible to confine the attention of a lively class to simple sentences anyone can analyze with a minimum of study. Dilettantes had better avoid diagramming, and so had the bird's-eye-viewers who like to be regarded as specialists in "language" without knowing any languages accurately. Structuralists whose training and interests have stressed phonemics and slighted syntax will have trouble with diagramming and will find it easier simply to talk about general principles, or to give the time to linguistic devotionals such as Allen collected in his *Readings in Applied Linguistics* (1958).

What type of diagramming will seem most satisfactory depends partly on the type of grammatical analysis employed. Those who want to start with the smallest units and proceed step by step to the largest have great difficulty in working out a reasonably simple, clear method of diagramming. They cannot make a good grammar either: they are simply starting at the wrong end. Those who start with the larger syntactic components of English sentences—subjects, predicates, complements, adjuncts, isolates such as *ouch*, *yes*, and the *danger* of signs—have a much easier time. The method of diagramming used in the schools is obviously inadequate; furthermore such diagrams cannot be done on a typewriter. The most satisfactory method of diagramming I have ever used was developed a decade ago by John Malcolm Forsman.

Attitudes toward diagramming are inevitably tied up with attitudes toward all careful grammatical analysis. In general, children learn spoken language unanalytically, and they master pronunciation better than adolescents and adults do. Perhaps the basic problem of the schools in teaching a second language—such as English in Puerto Rico or Spanish in the States—is to present adequate models to children under circumstances which arouse strong interest in what is being said. Probably films with sound tracks are the answer: series of twenty-minute plays with child actors could be very effective. Written language is normally learned more analytically. The careful sentence structure of the written language, and its punctuation, can be taught systematically to advantage; and this gets teachers into systematic grammar and often into diagramming. Spelling can be taught systematically up to a point too, and this gets teachers into systematic

phonemics; but it is hard to see any point in putting full phonemic analysis—including indication of pitches, stresses, and junctures—into textbooks, as has been done in such Trager-Smith texts as the American Council of Learned Society's *El Ingles Hablado* (1953). Between full phonemic analysis and full syntactic analysis, certainly the second is to be preferred. Phonemicist structuralists who chide traditionalists for wasting students' time in unprofitable analysis should take a good look at their own procedures. They should ponder Whatmough's remark that the layman regards phonemic analysis as "sterile."

Certainly those who as teachers undertake to correct other people's English should have a respectable knowledge of systematic grammar. I cannot agree with Sledd's contention, in the *May English Journal*, that it is now necessary for teachers of English to master three distinct grammatical systems. Life is short, and it seems better for the average teacher to master one system thoroughly, letting his instructor select the system to be mastered. I myself have taught several different systems in the past twenty years, and I have had a good deal of grammatical knowledge forced on me by my attempts to defend indefensible analyses. When any system is taught thoroughly, students learn a great deal about the structure of the language.

Diagramming is extremely useful in any solid course in grammar for teachers and prospective teachers. Personally, I find it useful at more elementary levels too. Warfel notwithstanding, I would not want to teach any course at any level if it did not involve "intellectual discipline."

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## Theme Grader Par Excellence

When I called on Professor Green of the English Department in his untidy office at good old State U. to get a story for *The CEA Critic*, I found him bubbling over with delight.

"At last," he said, unpiling papers and books from a chair so that I could sit down, "we are getting somewhere. The correcting of freshman themes has always been one of the most costly and tiresome operations at the university. The monstrous staff we have needed in our department to do this work has been a fiscal scandal. Now we've worked out a solution which will be the sensation of the academic world!"

"I've heard of your work," I said as I sat down. "That's why I dropped in. I hope you will tell me about it."

"Just think," Professor Green replied, opening a large chart and spreading it out on his desk, "what our researches will mean! In the future, instead of teaching 90 to 100 students in four sections, our instructors can easily handle five to six hundred, and they'll have time to spare. All we needed was to be scientific—to learn from our colleagues. Keep up with the times is what I say!"

"What's your secret?" I asked, growing really interested.

"Well," the professor replied, "It's so simple I wonder no one thought of it before. In this day of statistics and computers, why English teachers should still insist on old-fashioned, wasteful methods is beyond me. We have shown by careful studies, based on a very large sample of themes, that the average freshman misspells 7.801 words out of each 250, uses 1.624 dangling modifiers, .953 comma faults, and so on. It's all tabulated."

So it was. Across the top of the chart were the names of thirty basic errors in writing. Down the side were the samples examined, in batches of thousands of themes; and at the bottom, the columns were averaged carefully.

"Of course we have to round out to whole figures in using our results," the professor said. "That's what scientists always do. But what a saving in eyesight, time, and energy! Now we can really expect our freshman staff to engage in creative scholarship. They will have time to burn!"

"But I don't understand," I said. "How can you use these findings?"

"That's the whole point," the professor replied, rubbing his hands. "Frankly, we can't any longer afford not to use them; we can't go on spending time on minute and insignificant individual differences. On the basis of my statistics I have invented this machine which will apply a stamp to the margin of each page of a theme. An instructor can easily correct a hundred themes an hour, or more, with the aid of the electric motor and the automatic feed."

He rolled a neatly designed black box on a typing table over to him, picked up a freshman theme from his desk, inserted it in a slot in the box, and pressed a button. The wheels churned for a few seconds and the theme emerged with grade and comment neatly stamped on the front. On the margin of each page the symbol Sp appeared eight times, DM twice, CF once, and so on. Chuckling with pleasure, the professor pointed out that errors which occur on an average of only once in seven or eight hundred words were marked on every other page; some errors were marked on every third or fourth page.

"The comment and the grade caused us some trouble," he said. "Of course, not every theme gets the same grade or comment. Grades are easy to work out statistically, but a lot of research went into the study of comment frequency. We think we've licked the problem."

"But how," I asked, "do you make allowance for improvement in work?"

"Of course our machine can still be perfected," Professor Green replied, "and

no doubt it will be. But we've done something about that too. We've made charts for each month of the year. Later we may make them for each week." He swung the machine around. On the back was a sliding lever which could be moved on a scale marking the months from September through May. "The lever selects the proper cams for each month," he said. "It will take care of that problem."

"But what about the exceptionally good student who makes no errors, or the exceptionally poor student who makes many more than your machine allows for?" I asked.

(Please turn to page 8)

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## If We Yearn To Be a Profession...

(Continued from page 1)

ment as to the qualifications of one's professional peers is a rejection of a basic responsibility of a profession. If we will not help to guard our own profession against the presence of incompetents and blackguards and weaklings, do we actually hope to establish a profession—or rather to hold a sinecure?

The public meeting of CEA at the Christmas convention in Philadelphia this year will present a panel weighing the question, "Are Graduate Schools Ruining Undergraduate English?" There are those in our profession who will bitterly answer YES; those will will bitterly answer NO. There are many who take an intermediate position of YES and NO, wishing in their hearts that there were a place for the dedicated teacher. But the researchism and the denigration of teaching which are generated by many of our most influen-

tial graduate programs would be no threat to the dedicated teaching profession, if in turn that dedicated profession had a sufficient faith in its own integrity and ability that it would subject itself to scrutiny, to evaluation by many means, to self-discipline, and to severe elimination of the unfit. "Teaching — and especially the teaching of English — is the last resort of the incompetent." If this is true, it lies with us in the profession — and specifically with us in CEA — not with our administrators only, to see that the good are identified and rewarded.

JOHN HICKS  
Executive Secretary, CEA

## THEME GRADER

(Continued from page 7)

For the first time Professor Green lost his good humor; his face grew red.

"This is precisely the trouble we are always running into!" he snapped, rising hastily. "People just don't have the right point of view! You'll have to reorient your thinking, young man, you and a lot of conservative English teachers too. This is a statistical age we live in. There's no room any long for all this fuss about minute differences. They are infinitesimals, unimportant!"

"Well," I said, rising also, "maybe you're right. But how can you prevent a falling paper from getting the A grade and comment occasionally?"

The professor's voice rose in anger. "You've taken too much of my time already!" he shouted. "I admit the machine isn't perfect. But is the average English teacher perfect either? And we at least have a firm statistical basis for what we're doing. Good day, young man, good day."

LEE E. HOLT  
American International College

## LATIN DEFENDED

(Continued from page 5)

this full well, for he added: "I suppose all literate people are indebted to Latin courses for their intelligent interpretation of words—their meaning, construction, etc."

Mr. Art Gleeson, Director of Sports of the Mutual Broadcasting Company, remarked in his answer to letter Number Two: "I did study Latin for one year

in high school, and I believe it is one of the finest subjects anybody can study."

For a final word, Russian advancement in science and foreign-language education has stirred our country out of its lethargy in regard to these matters; and much talk is going the rounds of expanding our foreign-language programs in the schools. This is all well and good. But the reminder is in order that this is an extraordinarily difficult task in our present disordered linguistic circumstances. We have been too long neglecting or misdirecting the beginnings for language development, just as we have slighted the arithmetic and algebra that lie at the bottom of science and technology. It will not be hard in these "outer-space" times to demonstrate the need of tireless assiduity in these latter subjects. But as regards Latin, equally basic in the Western-Language sphere, this is, to use plain if imperfect language, something else again.

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